

Thank you for taking time for us to tell our story and be a part of this exciting democratic process. We are Will and Charlie Cote. We are a young family in agriculture. We raise hay and have a small cow/calf operation. Since the passing of my Dad, we run my family's ranch as well. We also have a family business with my husband's family where we provide a crane service in the Mission Valley.

We have a child on the autism spectrum. Our middle son, Decker was diagnosed at 2 years and 5 months and is currently 3 1/2. When this diagnosis was put in our laps we had a few options. Some were attainable, some were not. Will and I could have forfeited a lifestyle that we love and moved away, near a university that provided ABA therapy. That would have meant raising our family in an environment that was foreign with no support of community or extended family. We could not imagine separating Decker and his brother and sister from this Montana lifestyle that we love. We could not imagine being us without our rural way of life that consists of family, ranching, farming, hunting, fishing, rodeo...the list goes on and on. These things are what make us Montanans and this is a legacy that we want to hand down to our children.

Considering these factors, our decision was made; if it was this community that we couldn't leave we were going to have to depend on this community to help us heal our son. We had an overwhelming response from our town and were able to get our program underway. We are a family that prides ourselves in hard work and self sufficiency. But in this circumstance we had to put our pride aside and accept this hometown support as a "hand up" rather than a "hand out". Because this money was given to us by local people with big hearts and not necessarily deep pockets we felt even more compelled to work with dedication and diligence. We have hired the services of Redwood Learning Center out of Sandy, Utah. With their direction, we run and manage our own intensive therapy program out of our shop that we converted into a classroom. We have employed our family, friends and neighbors as instructors. As parents we teach, conduct meetings, over see our teachers, under take payroll responsibilities. Essentially we run and operate our own institution of learning in order to provide our son the best future he can have. We are overseen by two outside entities, one being Redwood Learning Center and the other, Child Development Center. We are now recognized at a state level and have been praised for running the best ABA program in the state of Montana. Decker now spends 30-40 hours per week in the classroom. Also he spends approximately 8 hours a week at Early Childhood Services. This program and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes have been a great support to Decker.

Decker has made huge gains. He has begun a beautiful transformation. A year ago he was in discontent 90% of his day. He would tantrum for hours on end, seventeen hours was the longest he endured. Decker went 18 months without sleeping a night through. When he was sleepless he was injuring himself by pulling his own hair out, biting through his own skin, choking and gagging himself to vomit multiple times in a matter of minutes. There were no more family outings as it would turn his world upside down for days. He lost all speech and all eye contact. He withdrew into this unpredictable world. These are not moments pulled from our darkest days, this was everyday. Our family changed. We became a family with autism. However, with God's grace, we are helping Decker return to us. After eight months of ABA therapy he is overall a different child. He is sleeping the night through with no more sleep medication. His eye contact is nearly normal. Rarely is he aggressive with himself or his siblings. Our son no longer has trouble coping with outings or changes in routine. He has regained a small amount of speech and other skills to get his needs met. Decker has acquired a wealth of new play skills. He is at a mastery level in puzzles, shape sorters, matching, and many, many more programs. He engages and interacts again. We are discovering Decker again. All of the sacrifices have been worth it but there's a lot of work left to do.

As parents, Will and I have chosen a clear path for Decker. We felt obligated to only use therapies that were evidence based and apply them intensely. Ultimately we know that autism is an epidemic and it is on the rise. We understand what it is like to love someone with a disability. We understand that this disability is a workaholic. We understand that autism does not take a weekend or a holiday. We understand that there is no such thing as an evening at home with your family without the disability. It does not wait outside the front door and it doesn't stay at the office. It becomes part of the fabric that makes up our being. Will and I believe that this is quite possibly the biggest challenge that we will face in our entire lives. However, there is no one who works harder than our baby. He is like David, he is up against giants. We rely on Jesus, we depend on each other and we have high hopes. Not only hope for Decker but for any other family facing our same challenge. I think that positive change starts with advocates like you and I. We would embrace the chance to dig in and go to work right alongside you. I can provide, upon request, some informative studies that support the necessary therapies for these children, and some information in regard to changes that other states have accomplished and what some others are working toward.

In closing, we are definitely proponents of SB 234. We are in favor not only for the benefit of our own son but every child that follows behind him. Unfortunately, there will be many. Let us as a State embrace them and give them the treatment that they need and deserve.

Respectfully,

Will, Charlie, Carter, Decker and Timber Cote

Tuesday, February 03, 2009

To the honorable committee,

I am a proponent of this bill.

This Bill not only makes sense, it is the right thing to do regardless of whether you are a Republican or Democrat. Montana kids with special needs are not asking for special treatment, just equal treatment.

My son, a Montanan, Jake Janssen is now 14 years old and in school at Ronan Middle School. I cannot be here today in person because he is going through some life changes that we as a society take for granted. At this stage in his life, puberty is in full swing. Jake is now temporarily being taught by Ronan School District at home because his tension level is very high. Based on his limited communication skills with his teachers, his tension level has escalated beyond the normal 14 year old boy, and when you cannot get your point across, the only way for him to communicate is with aggression. Oh, did I mention my future Montana Grizzly football player is 6' foot, 215 pounds right now.

My wife has been forced to take off work for three months under the Federal Family Leave and Medical Act and this has been granted just yesterday, this is unpaid family leave so our financial situation will become harder.

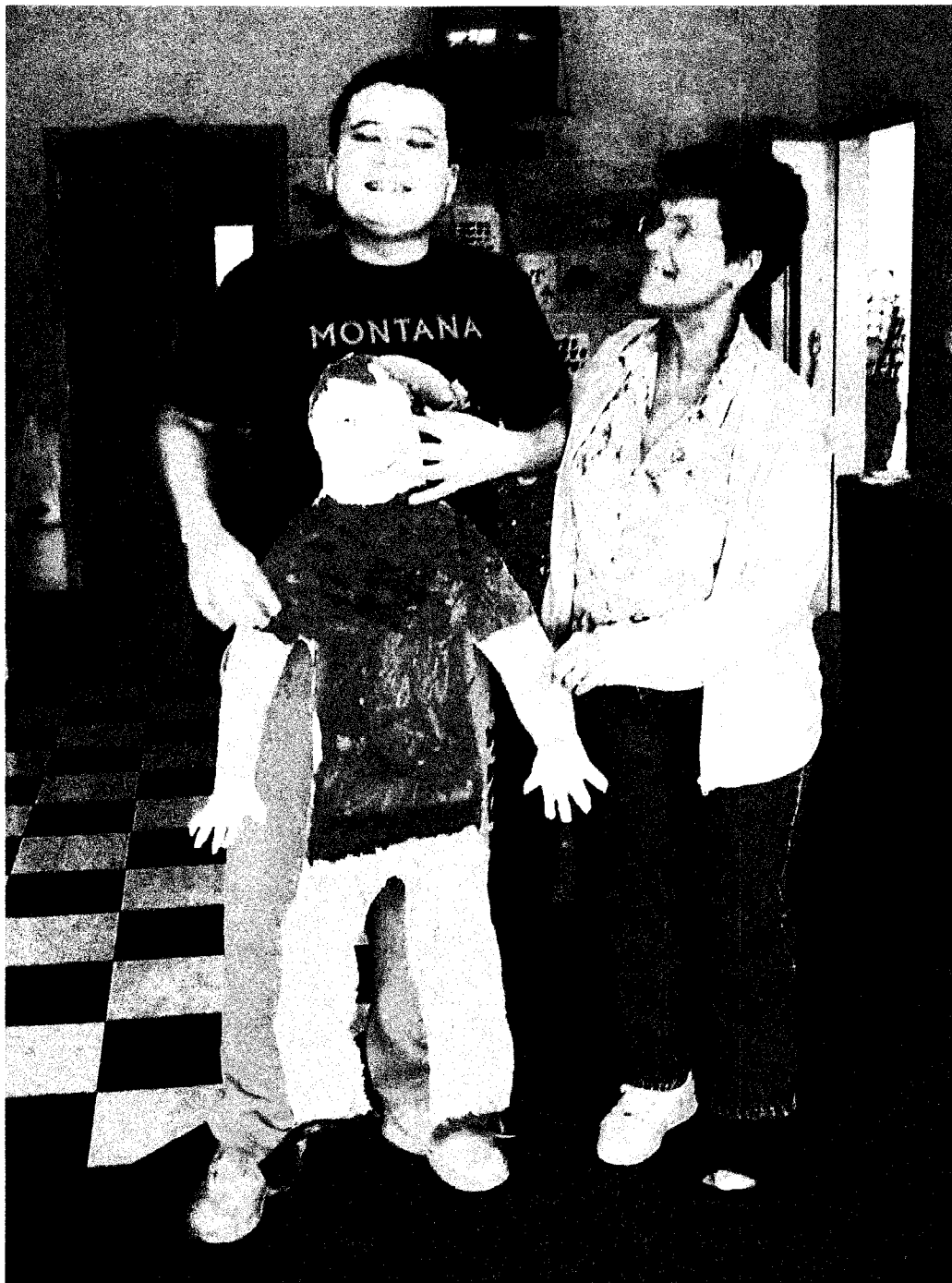
Since my son was diagnosed with Autism on May 8, 1998 I estimate the different treatments, vitamins, therapies, etc. that are not covered by normal health insurance has cost my family well over \$50,000 dollars.

Insurance companies must pay a little now, or allot later.

For my son's sake, and for those with Autism within the great state of Montana, I urge you to vote yes on this common sense bill.

Respectfully,

Rich Janssen AKA JAKES DAD
45466 North Foothills Drive
Ronan, MT 59864



Jake Janssen at School in Ronan



Please vote to pass Brandon's Bill for our son, Isaac, and all the wonderful, deserving Montana children on the autism spectrum.

My 4-year old son Isaac was diagnosed with Autism on January of 2007. Before that, we thought something was a little different about our son. He often wouldn't respond to us when we called. His daycare providers asked if he had a hearing problem. He wouldn't always make eye contact with us and even when we positioned our faces right in front of his, he would look away. He never said yes or no or nodded his head. He ran into us head on from across the room and bounced his head on pillows and balls. He rarely cried when he fell or was injured. We thought he was just a tough little guy. We thought the suggested ages on the toys we bought him weren't developmentally correct because he wouldn't play with them; instead, he'd line things up or arrange them over and over. He didn't seem to care to play with other kids or notice them at daycare. After a particularly difficult day at daycare, the director suggested developmental testing. That was in October and he received his diagnosis in January of 2007.

After the initial shock of his diagnosis, we began our quest for information. We discovered that early intervention is what he needed and it had to begin immediately. So we signed him up for speech therapy and consulted an occupational therapist for his sensory needs. We enrolled him in two very structured preschools, read all the books we could get our hands on and consulted with many professionals regarding behavioral interventions. The clock was ticking as we searched for ways to help him. What we found is that behavioral therapy could change our son's life but they are all very expensive and not covered by our health insurance. We wondered how we could afford to give our son the best care and feared what would happen if we didn't. We had to come to terms with the fact that providing my son with what he needed may mean depleting all of our resources or worse, bankruptcy. But, he is our son and we will do everything we can to give him the opportunity to have a full life and as much independence as possible. There are lots of appointments, the introduction of a special diet which makes it challenging and expensive to prepare meals, visual and sensory tools to help him navigate his day and behavioral intervention that we do here at home.

Isaac, like many kids on autism spectrum, can also have sleep problems. He sometimes wakes up crying and screaming, inconsolable and unable to tell us how to help. We rock him and walk him, tell him a story or massage his feet, sometimes it seems like nothing we do is helping and we've thought that maybe our touch or movement is making things worse, at these times we may just sit with him as he cries until he stops. During the summertime when we have our windows open, we're sure the sound is heard by our neighbors. We wonder if we should explain to them about our son. Certainly they must

be concerned to hear our child cry out, "No mommy, no daddy" or "help me" over and over again as we try to help soothe him. We're certain that they, like strangers that may see us in the mall and witness my son melting down and throwing himself on the floor, may wonder what kind of parents we are.

When Isaac was younger and smaller, there was more understanding, but we see a shift now that he is getting older. There are judgements made by others who may not understand that they are witnessing a meltdown by a child who has worked extremely hard to navigate the sights, sounds and smells of a new environment and then reached the a point when he just couldn't process one more piece of information.

Isaac is verbal, but much of his language comes from books, movies or situations from which he draws. With the help of a speech therapist and his younger brother, Elijah, he has come a long way and is learning to have conversations. We learned early on that all of his communications are precious and we put a lot of energy into responding and trying to show him how conversation works and that communication is worthwhile.

At times Isaac can become so focused on something of interest to him, that he is very hard to reach. We may have to call his name several times, and he may still not answer. Not knowing him, a person may think he is just ignoring them. His little brother is highly aware of these moments and tells me, "Mommy, Isaac can't hear you right now."

We know that although we love Elijah, we put a lot of energy into helping Isaac during this crucial time. Sometimes my heart aches a little as I look at my other little guy and wonder if he's getting all of the attention that he needs and if we'll be able to provide him with a college education. He is such a blessing to us and his brother. He is Isaac's first friend and they love eachother very much. Autism is part of our lives and we're all going to be in it together. Isaac is one of the hardest working kids we know, so we will continue to work hard, like all families affected by autism do, continue to be practitioners and advocates and pray that our community embraces our son as he makes his way through the school system, through his teens and into his adult life. ***Please vote to pass Brandon's Bill.*** Help us help our beloved son and children like him that deserve to receive all of the care they need to succeed.

Sincerely,

Denise Dahlberg
4703 Miller Creek
Missoula, MT 59803

CROSS DIAMOND BOOM SERVICE, INC.
P.O. BOX 215
RONAN, MONTANA 59864
644-2584

MARCH 30, 2009

Chairman Sesso and Members of the House Appropriations Committee,

My husband Gary and I are owners of a small family owned crane, welding and fabricating business in Ronan. We are 100% in support of SB 234. We would be happy to pay whatever small increase that there would be in our health insurance, so families with autistic children will have an opportunity to provide the much needed therapy, which will be integral to their child's recovery. It would be a very sad day, if this bill is not passed, that we as taxpayers will then be paying for these very same children as they grow into adulthood, for their care in group homes, and the worst scenario-institutionalization, because our legal system, which is our government-people like you and me, have failed them terribly! AGAIN—We support SB 234!

Respectfully,


Christine D. Cote

Will & Charlie Cote

From: Audrey [acmg_vet02@ronan.net]
Sent: Thursday, March 05, 2009 3:11 PM
To: coteranch@ronan.net
Subject: Letter for Decker

March 5, 2009

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Senate Bill 234

As the owner of a small business in a rural area of the state of Montana, we urge you as an individual representing the people of Montana, as a concerned citizen, and as a parent, to support the passage of Senate Bill 234 that requires insurance companies to cover the treatment of autism.

As we have seen, early intervention is crucial to the development of an autistic child. Not only is it crucial to the child's development, it is more cost effective for the life span of that individual on both the families and the communities in which they live whether it be medical or educational. The child has a much better chance of leading a happy, productive life, too.

Please consider the importance of passage of Senate Bill 234 on the state of Montana and its citizens and vote to pass this important Bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

THE TOTAL HOME

Audrey Granley
62579 Hwy 93
Ronan, MT 59864

3/31/2009

Will & Charlie Cote

From: Edred Vizcarra [evizcarra@stlukehealthnet.org]
Sent: Tuesday, February 03, 2009 6:21 PM
To: coteranch@ronan.net
Subject: SB 234

Dear Charlie,

It is good to see Montana joining other states in the drive to require insurance coverage for autism and autism spectrum disorders. With the incidence of autism and its spectrum of disorders now approaching 1 in 150 births in the United States it seems imperative that resources be spent on early diagnosis so treatment resulting in improved outcomes and decreased disability will save greater expenditure of resources for later care. It's good to know that Decker is improving. Hopefully legislation like this will make the therapies he is participating in available to more children in Montana.

Sincerely,

Ed Vizcarra, M.D.

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3/31/2009

We write this letter as a concerned aunt and uncle of Will Cote and his wife Charlie. We have never experienced Autism first hand till our loving Decker entered our lives. He is all needing and also so loved. There is one thing that he needs and that is professional help that often depletes the family financially, as well as mentally. Our insurance companies should recognize this ever growing problem and step forward with a comprehensive plan to support these families and their children. With cutbacks in every area of healthcare this burden falls more and more on the individuals. We need help! Autism is on the rise with no cure, no cause, and only rising health costs.

It is truly a sad case when we have to say once again, "suffer the children". This is not only a Montana health issue but a national one.

Please take this Senate Bill and move it forward and maybe Montana will lead the nation in this cause.

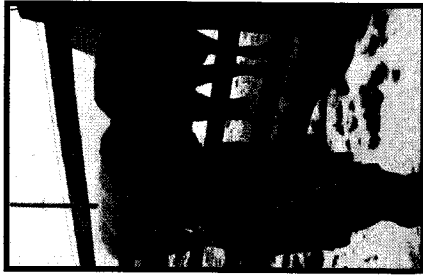
Yours truly,
Constantine and Diane Plaissay
51283 Hillside Road
Charlo, MT 59824
Dicon4374@blackfoot.net



The Cote family would like to recognize the following businesses and individuals for their integral support in our efforts to fight Decker's autism. You are valued and appreciated and represent the true meaning of "community". Thank you for helping make "Decker's Dream" come true.

Ace Hardware of Ronan
 All Creatures Mobile Clinic
 All In Stitches
 Arnie's Gas and Tire
 Aware Wellness Center
 Barbara Schliep
 Best Buy of Missoula
 Bruce Simpson & Family
 Cal Courville & Tom Meeks Families
 Cenex Harvest States
 Charmel Gillin
 Cheff's Guest Ranch
 Chris, RaLynn, & Brody Brown
 Cooper Family
 Cote Family
 Cripple Creek Naturals
 Cross Diamond Boom Service
 Crows Nest Gallery
 Dairy Queen
 Discount Carpets
 Family Health Pharmacy
 Grace Sager
 Harbor Light Furniture & Flooring
 Jackie M's Footwear

There's lots more...



Mountain View Art Studio
 Mountain Waters Recreation
 Muley Bluz
 Nells Harem
 Page by Page Books
 Rocking Horse Wood Works
 Ronan Chiropractic
 Ronan Dodge
 Ronan Eye Clinic
 Ronan Flower Mill
 Ronan McDonalds
 Ronan Sports & Western
 Ronan Telephone Co.
 Ronan Woman's Club
 Shane & Carol Roberts
 The Cove Deli & Pizza
 Ronna Walchuk
 S & S Sports
 Second Childhood
 Shane Reum
 Showboat Cinemas
 St. Char ro
 Stageline Pizza
 Studio 93
 Super 1 Foods
 The First Resort
 The Red Poppy
 The Terrace
 The Total Home
 Three Dog Down
 Thrivent Financial
 Tim Bagnell DDS, PC
 Valley Bank
 Westland Seed

Jore Corporation
 Judy's Town and Country
 Konen Family Chiropractic
 KwaTaqNuk
 Les Schwab of Ronan
 Lucky Strike Lanes
 M-Diamond Qtr. Horses
 Mission Mart
 Mission Mtn. Flying Serv.
 M.V. Printing
 Mission View Garden Club
 Phillips Saddlery
 Pieces
 Plaissay Family
 Port Polson Players
 Power Products
 Radio Shack
 Ratcliff, Barce &
 Associates
 Reflections
 Reynolds Rentals
 WBC of Ronan &
 Polson
 Western Reflections
 Photography
 Wild Horse Art Gallery

Please patronize
 these businesses &
 thank the individuals
 for their continuing
 community support!



A DREAM for DECKER



DECKER is 2 1/2 & has been
 diagnosed with Autism.
 His family is asking for your
 help to defray therapy expenses.

Please consider
 helping the Cote Family
 by donating to the

**BENEFIT ACCOUNT AT
 VALLEY BANK
 of RONAN**
 or any branch office



Decker Rivera Cote is 2 1/2 years old and is the son of Will and Charlie Cote, Ronan. His grandparents are Gary and Chris Cote and Diane and the late Tom Torres, all of Ronan.

Decker has recently been diagnosed with Autism. His parents, brother Carter and sister Timber, are embarking on a new adventure so that Decker can be provided with therapy.

Early intervention is critical for Decker, his family, his education, his future and his community.

With help from the Redwood Learning Center, Decker's team will provide 30-40 hours of intensive, expensive, home-based therapy per week.

Most financial avenues have been exhausted. This family is requesting the help of the Mission Valley. YOUR HELP IS VALUED and APPRECIATED!



Decker at Halloween '07

For more info about Decker call 676-0103 or 207-4049 or e-mail coteranch@ronan.net. For more info about Redwood Learning Center www.sdredwood.com

The Redwood Learning Center will be working with Decker's family to implement an intensive home-based **Applied Behavior Analysis Therapy Program.**

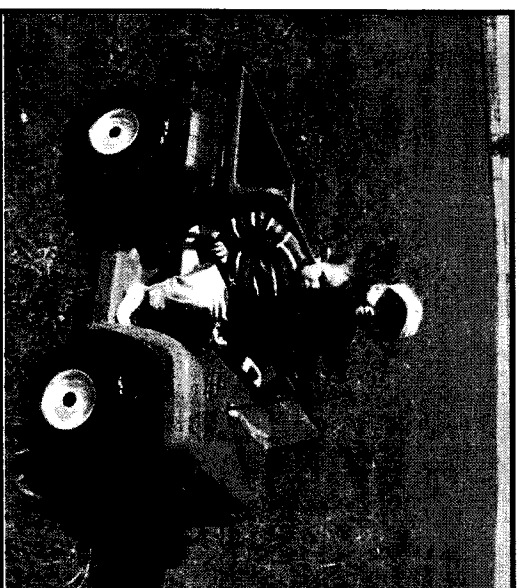
What is ABA?

In simple terms, ABA teaches complex tasks by breaking them down into "bite-sized" pieces that can be learned more easily, with each piece building on the previous.

Rewards, called "reinforcers", are given for correct responses or behaviors, while inappropriate responses or behaviors are corrected, ignored or redirected.

Precise data on each learning trial is recorded, and adjustments in the educational program are made accordingly.

Research shows that children who receive intensive behavioral treatment, preferably starting between two and five years old, not only have a chance to learn and improve, but some may even completely overcome the effects of autism!



Decker and his brother Carter

Autism is a "Spectrum Disorder". There are several developmental disorders that fall under this umbrella. Some include Autism Spectrum, Asperger's, Reti's and Pervasive Developmental Disorder.

Symptoms that may be present:

- * impairment in social interaction, eye contact, facial expression
- * delay or total lack of communication, spoken language, gestures, impairment in ability to initiate or sustain conversation, lack of varied, spontaneous, make-believe play.

- * restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, abnormal fascination and obsession and intensity, self-stimulation, e.g. hand or finger flapping.



Decker with Mom... and Dad



Decker with Dad, Uncle Tim, Papa Tom, Mom & Timber, Yaya Diane & Carter